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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 001053

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SUBJECT: INDIAN FOREIGN SECRETARY READOUT OF SRI LANKA TRIP

REF: NEW DELHI 996

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Peter Burleigh for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

11. (C) Summary. In a May 22 briefing for the Charge, Foreign Secretary Menon provided a readout of his visit, along with National Security Advisor MK Narayanan, to Colombo on May 20-21. India's message to President Rajapaksa was to focus on resettling IDPs, reconstruction, demining, and the long-term political solution. Menon highlighted that he believed short-term relief for internally displaced persons and the beginning of economic reconstruction would be possible, but that he was more concerned with President Rajapaksa's determination to implement a long-term political solution which would include all elements of Sri Lankan society, most notably the Tamil population. Menon felt that differences within the Tamil community were complicating the way forward on the political issues. End Summary.

----- Indian Message: Resettlement, Reconstruction, and a Long-Term Political Solution -----

12. (C) Indian Foreign Secretary Shiv Shankar Menon provided Charge with a readout of his trip, accompanying National Security Advisor MK Narayanan, to Colombo on May 20-21. Menon said that he had been "pleasantly impressed" with President Rajapaksa's consideration of what is right for Sri Lanka's long term interests, despite a triumphant atmosphere in Colombo. Menon and Narayanan delivered a message that included: 1) urging President Rajapaksa to quickly resettle internally displaced persons (IDPs), noting that "even a 5-star camp is still a prison;" 2) stressing the need for a long-term political solution which included consideration for Tamil rights; and 3) an appeal for Rajapaksa to step up as a leader for the entire country -- including the Tamil population, which now finds itself without a clear leader.

13. (C) On resettlement of IDPs, Menon said he and Narayanan urged President Rajapaksa to begin immediately with demining and allowing families to sow their fields, even if permanent return to the villages had to follow shortly after. Menon noted that the President seemed to understand the benefits of early return.

14. (C) On the political solution, Rajapaksa confirmed all previous commitments about implementing the 13th Amendment, to include the Concurrent List of shared government functions

between the state and the provinces, and free and fair elections. However, Menon stated "the devil is in the details," adding that getting the government and an increasingly divided Tamil community to agree on implementation of "13-plus" would not be easy. Menon quoted President Rajapaksa as saying the government would be expanding the devolution list, but Menon did not believe there was a clear idea yet for what the "plus" of "13-plus" entailed yet beyond the creation of a new senate and an elaboration of the Concurrent List.

----- Split Among Tamils Troublesome -----

15. (C) Menon described meetings he had personally held with various Tamil parties during his visit, which revealed fissures between various Tamil groups as to what the next political steps should be. For instance, Menon cited the "DTNA" -- the Democratic Tamil National Alliance, an offshoot of the TNA or "regular" Tamil National Alliance. The DTNA had described to Menon a desire to immediately begin a return to "normal" life for displaced Tamils, with grass roots efforts to get people back to their villages and a priority on disarmament. The TNA, which Menon noted flew in from Chennai to meet with him in Sri Lanka, dismissed the 13th Amendment and said the preferred to "start from zero." Menon also cited other differences on the Tamil side, such as with the still-armed EPLF of Douglas Devanandan and the TNA hardliner GG Ponnambalam, and concluded "they seem to have huge problems among themselves." He told the Charge that his advice to the Tamil parties was to use this time in the

NEW DELHI 00001053 002 OF 002

immediate post-conflict situation to open up options for the Tamil people, instead of closing them through internal strife.

----- India to Stay Engaged, Will Assist -----

16. (C) A positive, long-term political solution in Sri Lanka was in India's interest, Menon argued. While he was optimistic that resettlement and reconstruction issues could be resolved in the short term, the political part "will take more work," he said. One positive development he had noticed was that individual non-governmental Tamils he knew in Colombo had told him that they actually felt more secure now than they had when Menon had last spoken with them a couple years ago. These contacts described to Menon how when they had recently raised concerns over their security to the President's Senior Advisor Basil Rajapaksa, they were reassured by the firm action the government had taken. Citing a complaint by President Rajapaksa that he had not been able to engage with Tamil politicians since the end of combat operations, Menon stated that India intended to remain in close touch with Tamil politicians and would continue to encourage them to engage with the government. He said that India would stress the point that disarmament of all parties, including those linked to the government, was an essential part of the process and needed to begin as early as possible.

Menon and Narayanan also urged President Rajapaksa to forego the idea of trying Tamil rebels in special courts, and while Rajapaksa cited the use of such courts in 1971 (vis-a-vis the then JUP rebels), he did acknowledge the Indians' point that such a process could be divisive for the country. Additionally, Menon pointed out that India currently has two army and two non-governmental teams in Sri Lanka to conduct demining operations, and intended to send two more soon, in order to facilitate the return of IDPs to their fields.

17. (C) On next steps, Menon felt the international community should continue to press for access by the UN, international agencies and NGOs into the IDP camps, but cautioned that pressure was not the right approach. Rather, Menon reasoned, India's approach -- which Menon believed was more effective than pressure and urged be adopted by others -- was to try to make President Rajapaksa understand how it was in his own interest to open up to the international community,

essentially playing to Rajapaksa's sense of historical importance. While Rajapaksa might be driven by personal ambitions, as opposed to moral obligations, he did understand his interest in having the political process succeed, Menon opined, and could be pointed in the right direction on effectively reaching out to the Tamil population.

18. (C) Comment. Interestingly, the concept of India hosting an international conference on Sri Lanka, which Menon had floated in a previous conversation with the Charge (reftel), was not raised during this briefing. Instead, Menon described a need to allow President Rajapaksa the opportunity to follow through on promises to provide for resettlement, reconstruction and an inclusive devolution process. While access to camps needed immediate attention from the international community, the Indian position seems to have shifted slightly, away from pressuring the Sri Lankan government and toward vigilantly watching it proceed to honor its commitments. End Comment.
BURLEIGH